

St. Louis, MO--This afternoon, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told the Navy League in Washington that "at the end of the day, we have to ask whether the nation can really afford a Navy that relies on \$3 to 6 billion destroyers, \$7 billion submarines, and \$11 billion carriers." In response, Congressman Todd Akin, Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee, made the following comment:

"I share Secretary Gates' concern that affordability issues may force us to sacrifice quantity in shipbuilding. At some point, quantity does matter when it comes to our naval forces. This is the reason the Navy had to walk away from the next generation cruiser. But I would extend Secretary Gate's analogy further - can the nation afford a Navy and Marine Corps that rely on \$200-\$300 million fighter aircraft when we have highly capable 4.5 generation fighter aircraft that costs 60- 70% less than that? If the budget remains stagnate, or shrinks, we will need to make these tough decisions across the board -- they are not unique to shipbuilding."

Secretary Gates also highlighted the U.S. Navy's overmatch in terms of capabilities. Congressman Akin responded to this statement as well:

"While Secretary Gates rightly identifies the Navy's amazing capabilities, we cannot afford to err in the opposite direction. Peace through weakness is not a viable option. I also believe we should exercise caution in comparing the size of the U.S. fleet to other countries. For example, we may have more large-deck amphibious ships than any other nation, but according to DoD, those same platforms were stretched in every force planning scenario of the recent Quadrennial Defense Review. They are not simply combat forces, but enable the United States to perform the range of missions we're called on to perform throughout the world. When you couple the reality that the U.S. naval forces are called upon to respond to more and highly complex missions, with the asymmetric capabilities being developed in other countries, one cannot simply slash quantities of vessels on the basis that other nations have smaller navies. Furthermore, I believe Secretary Gates is responding to pressure resulting from the Administration's unwillingness to commit to an appropriate level of national defense spending. Although the Administration is very willing to tremendously expand entitlement programs, its lack of prioritization of national defense spending is in my opinion adding to the Secretary's inclination to entertain the downsizing of our naval capacity."